

THE POLITICS OF PRACTICAL-ORIENTED EDUCATION: IMPLEMENTING INAUTHENTIC EDUCATION

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Abstract

This article focuses on the purpose of education and its role in the social-economical postmodern context. A historical and philosophical approach on education discovers that its authentic status, the essence of the human being, was forgotten while, in a modern and more pragmatic approach, it is considered to be a possession essential to intellectual work. This is reflected in the education policies that try to optimize the economical results of intellectual work and contribute to economical prosperity. But approaching education as a tool means approaching the human being as an object and it is important to return to another kind of education, placing the accent on another dimension of the human being besides that of being an economical actor. Education is not something the human being does, it is something through which the human being becomes a human being.

Keywords: *Paideia, homo laborans, theoria, praxis, human being.*

*The vast majority of the intellectuals
I know aren't seeking anything,
aren't doing anything, and, for now,
aren't capable of working.
They consider themselves intelligent,
they thou an thee their servants,
with the peasants they behave as with animals,
they don't study, don't read anything worth-while,
about science they only talk about,
they only know so few of art.
Trofimov in A.P. Cehov's
Sour Cherry's Orchard play*

Education was, in the past, considered to be the privilege of few, mainly of Aristocracy, because this social class had the financial means of procuring education. Education was not practically oriented for this privileged class, as Aristocracy didn't depend on it for procuring means of life. The current politics ensuring free public education for the masses are relatively new, following recognition of the right to education as one of the fundamental rights of the person. But not only is education a right, it is also

an obligation, as in the states where there is free education, this education is also mandatory to a certain level of knowledge. The philosophy behind public education is based on the idea of liberating masses and giving them equal chances to financial prosperity. Education is not a purpose on itself, but a means for a way of life. But behind this noble philosophy there is a whole other dimension that shouldn't be overlooked. Education is not only a right, it is a tool through which masses are used as labour force, not as they were in the past, as physical labour force, but as an intellectual force, because now the power is knowledge. Education is not looked at as a way of growing in spirit, but as currency towards a material gold: financial prosperity.

In the Industrial Era transition was made from manual, mainly agricultural labour force, to machine-operating labour force. The replacement of manual labour with machines is called The Industrial Revolution. The use of technology in the production process had cost most people their jobs, their salary and, consequently, their means of life, as few workers were needed. The role of the worker had changed from doing the work to supervising the work machines made. The apparition of the Industrial Era boosted production, led to the development of cities and science (Wikipedia Encyclopedia). As humanity evolved technically, the labour force necessary became dependent of technical education, weather it is the worker with competences in machine-handling, or the inventor that uses his science – education in order to develop new machines and contribute to the industrial progress.

The difference between science and technique is important, as it is the difference between education as purpose and education as means to

achieving practical results, meaning the education as labour tool. The difference between science and technique was noticed by famous culture philosophers as Hannah Arendt, Martin Heidegger and Hans Georg Gadamer. Along with Hannah Arendt, Heidegger noticed the transformation of the human being from *homo faber* (the man who invests his work with meaning) to *animal laborans* (man as part of the mechanical process) (May, 2009, p. 49). Along with this transformation, education has changed, too. If education was, in the past, a way to something, it was a way of giving meaning to the world, of learning about the meaning that other people gave it. The only practical-result of the education was, in this context, the new meaning of the world that resulted as a consequence of the education process, as the pupil personalized the received information. The practical orientation in education is now another: education is a way of achieving technical results that can be used in the work process. Education for education is dead. Hans Georg Gadamer notices that the ancient Greek science was marked by the unity of *theoria* and *praxis*, both of them considered to be a form of knowledge (participation, acting in solidarity) as the modernity separates the theory (reduced to an abstract, acting-free idea) of practice (reduced to the technical aspect of application of the abstract theory) (Swayne, 2010, p. 58). The practical-application model no longer keeps the original sense of practice. According to the modern science, knowledge is what the expert possesses (*Ibid.*, p. 60). The individual replaces in this context the practical task of creating life meaning with the task of appropriating survival techniques (*Ibid.*, p. 59). Education is now a matter of possessing a technical qualification necessary to survival, in spite of the fact that nor science, nor education should be considered possessions.

But in The Modern Era mankind marked a technical evolution and, as a result of this revolution, intellectual labour force was needed. In order to obtain the qualified labour force, new education politics was needed. Behind the philosophy of the right to education and the struggle of emancipation of the social classes there was the necessity of technical progress of mankind, whose beneficiaries are still an exclusive social class that owns the intellectual

labour force. As in the past the masses were used as physical labour force, in the present they are educated in order to boost another kind of production, namely a technical one. Education is not liberation of masses, it is not rendering the so far denied privilege of education, it has not the purpose of ensuring access to knowledge in order to benefit the individual's spiritual growth. Instead, the education masses receive is practically-oriented in the sense that the finality of the educational process is to ensure practical results, financially-measurable. The finality of the education process is making the individual lucrative. Education ensures the individual a qualification, integration in the labour – force and, thus, the survival means and a decent way of life. The purpose of education has lost its initial meaning and has become a business. Investing in education is not investing in people for the sake of their inner growth, but investing in people in order to achieve profit. The more educated a person is, the more likely the person becomes financially rentable. It looks like a win-win situation: the individual receives the means to life, the employer and the whole society, by using the individual in the labour field, progresses. Moreover, the masses are convinced that they obtained a long-denied right.

But there is no authentic education involved in this equation. Education is only a tool in obtaining labour force. If this were not the case, education politics would not make the know-how its main focus, would not be so practically-oriented and would not have as its main objective ensuring profitable results. What the masses received is not education. It is a technical update in order to render them capable of intellectual work. Education beneficiaries are mere workers that believe to be privileged. The education that is mandatory for masses to receive is actually false education, because it is only a labour qualification. Masses are still rarely interested in other types of Education, if we are to judge after the fact that a person chooses a certain type of education with the intent to build a career. The practical utility of the studies are an important selection criteria. Few people choose an education for the sake of culture and knowledge alone, as it is necessary that they work and find means of subsistence.

The Greek *paideia* treasured humanism, as it meant the process of educating man into his genuine human nature (Naugle, 2009, p. 1). *Paideia* had a political finality as it aimed at moulding the young in the solidarity spirit of an ideal citizen of the Polis (Castle, 1961, p. 80). For the Greeks, education had to do with the making of men, not with training men to make things (*Ibid.*, p. 77). It is not a foreign ideal that the Greeks tried to impose on people, it is an ideal inherent to everyone and education is an enterprise of achieving one's potential. As social being, integration in the Polis is an important aspect of one's true self. The purpose is not the prosperity of the polis. The prosperity is a consequence of the prosperity of each individual within the polis. Similarly to Hegel's idea of the truth as a process of becoming the concrete realization of the abstract idea, The Greeks tried to make man what it already was by definition, help him become himself. Even though it had the ideal of the perfect *polis* in mind, *paidea* did not mean integrating man into the *polis*'s economical system as education does today. Even though human sciences are still mandatory in the present school curricula, education is a matter of general-culture possession at most, because we no longer report to knowledge as something one is, but to knowledge a possession with which one can work, make economic profit and subsist. Even the modern request of personal growth through one's career accentuates the good management of one's personal work potential, proving more useful skills to be used.

The right to education is nowadays the right to have means of subsisting at most, if not an obligation to contribute to the technical progress and the world's economy. Masses have not become more emancipated by gaining the right to education. They already had the right to work. It is at most a financial progress in the sense that qualified intellectual work often comes with a bigger financial reward and it is also a psychological progress, because the common man that follows a career tends to consider himself an important member of society and belonging to a higher class than the man with no education. Education has been thought to be a means of becoming part of a higher class, a means of overcoming one's precarious condition and

achieving the financial prosperity that the higher class already had. This phenomena works as reverse psychology: convince the masses that education is elitist and they will fight to procure it.

But the educated class is still the working class with no true education in the sense of Greek *paideia* and with no idea that they lack true education. Authentic education is still the privilege of the few. An example is the lower number of Philosophy students in Romania, as a result of the low employment chances. Students prefer to study those philosophical specializations that are more practice-oriented and more employment opportunities. In order to have authentic education for the masses, the entire educative system should cease to be subordinated to the economic system. The present education politics is oppressing the masses as true education is denied to them and the lack of authentic education is kept in the dark. And one cannot fight a wrong of which one does not know.

Why would the lack of authentic education be a wrong? What is wrong with education as getting specific knowledge that one can use in a profession? Why should we go back to the Greek *paidea*? The individual has the right to grow, and the individual can achieve maturity defined as natural growth through an authentic education that places the accents on man's nature. The human mind is not a possession. Consequently, knowledge is not a possession either. More likely, knowledge posses us, it shapes and moulds us. What we do is not independent of what we become. Using education as currency means sacrificing the person, means giving more importance to what one does and neglecting what one is becoming by doing. The practical-oriented education means, in the end, shaping people as working tools and neglecting their being. In this context, not only do people use their education as a tool instead of reporting to it as part of their being, but the whole society, too, uses people as tools schooled in order to increase their work productivity. That is a fundamentally wrong approach, as people shouldn't be seen as means to a purpose, but as purpose (in Kant's terms). Greek *paideia* and *praxis* both had social solidarity in mind. In the current paradigm social solidarity is reduced to

the cohesiveness due to the interdependence between work divisions. People are related to one another by what they do and not what by they are. And one of their rights is to be treated as a significant other, as a human person, as an equal and not as a tool.

The idea of this essay is not the recommendation to stop practical education, but to re-assess society's comprehension of it. Growing awareness about the importance of another kind of education does not mean neglecting the importance of work. On the contrary, the fact that work is important is why education politics should be less work-oriented and more human-oriented. Reducing education to work qualification means reducing man to its work capabilities and denying the possibility to grow as a human being through work.

There is a way to integrate professional education to the Greek concept of *paidea*, thus achieving both authentic education and work-competences. Earlier we mentioned the concept of work creativity that *Homo Faber* lived by in Arendt's and Heidegger's opinion. Man is not a separate entity of what he thinks and does, the human being is an unity of both. Mind and acting competences are not a possession of the human being, they define man and man defines himself through them. In Hegelian terms, objectifies himself through work. The Hegelian definition of truth supposes that the object in reality is the exteriorization of its concept, a confirmation of it. The exterior object and its concept are in an identity relation, that is, they need one another and they define one through the other. In the case of the worker and the product of his labour, for Hegel, "the objectification of something in the process of labour is not something negative, rather the objectification of consciousness in the product of labour is 'his pure self-existence' which, becomes 'truly realized' in the externalized

object. The bondsman through this process of labour and the objectification of its products creates a self-conscious existence" (Ashton, 1999). Correlating objectification through work and objectification as truth, man can discover his true self through work understood correctly. A proper professional education should start with understanding work as not something separate of what the human being does, but as something that human being is and something that defines his becoming.

This humanist ideal that should have priority in practicing education should not be the market economy, but the human being. The result would still be the economical prosperity, as the quality of the work would be not that of the product, but that of the human being. Society would also benefit due to a new cohesion structure, given not by the interdependence of work division and special skills, but given by what makes human beings special. If human beings are their skills, managing these skills means managing their being and that should mean authentic education.

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